CALTRANS/ WILLITS

Connection

NEWSLETTER FOR THE WILLITS BYPASS PROJECT WINTER 1998/99

Field Work In Progress

Caltrans staff are currently completing field work necessary for the biology, archaeological, architectural history and hydrology sections of the Draft Willits Bypass Environmental Impact Report/ Statement (EIR/EIS). Other studies in the EIR/EIS are also underway that may not require extensive field work. Currently, Caltrans' historians are examining properties to determine if they are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Biologists are completing botanical, avian, and fisheries surveys. Archaeologists are confirming the location of previously recorded archaeological sites. Hydrology experts are examining local drainage conditions and determining the improvements needed to mitigate adverse impacts. By the spring of 1999 all of our surveys for the Draft EIR/EIS should be completed.

Letters were sent to every property owner along each alternative alignment requesting permission for Caltrans personnel to enter their property. In most instances, Caltrans staff have and will continue to telephone property owners in advance to let them know that field personnel are coming out to their property. Our surveys are primarily visual observations; in most instances do not require any digging; and, no machinery is involved. All of our field personnel are experienced professionals and will leave any property they visit exactly as it was found. Caltrans workers are insured by the State's self insurance program. If there are any special conditions you wish us to follow, please let us know when you return your letters or respond to our telephone calls.

If you have any questions about our field visits please contact Dennis Castrillo at 530-741-4030.

Bypass on the Web

Would you like to know more about the Willits Bypass at 3:00 am on Sunday? If you have access to the Internet you can now get information about the proposed Willits Bypass any time of the day or night. Caltrans now has a website for the Bypass.

The address to the Willits Bypass website is: ***http://tresc.dot.ca.gov/district3/planning.new/willits.htm.***

The website includes a map, which shows the location of each proposed Bypass alternative. From the map, you can "click on" each of the seven "build" alternatives under consideration for a written description of their features. There is also a page, which allows users to find the answers to the most frequently asked questions about the Bypass including; its purpose, cost, funding and the public review process. The website also contains a feature that allows anyone to send and receive e-mail messages to or from Lena Ashley, the project manager for the Bypass. According to Rick Knapp, Caltrans District 1 Director, "We decided to establish a website for the Bypass because it provides people with another way of getting involved in the project and interacting with Caltrans staff. We still plan on having public meetings or workshops when the environmental documents are completed, but the website provides a way for people to be involved with the project on a regular basis. " In addition to the Willits Bypass, the website also has links to the Willits Chamber of Commerce and CERES, an environmental resource database. Soon internet access will be available through the County Library in Willits for those without personal computers.

Alternatives Under Consideration

Caltrans engineers and environmental specialists worked for several years to develop and evaluate, on a preliminary basis, more than twenty alternatives. Of these, seven "build" alternatives and a No Build Alternative are undergoing further study. These alternatives are intended to improve safety and provide for free flowing interregional traffic.

The alternatives under review include six freeway alternatives in three corridors, a minimal standard expressway through the city (Transportation System Management) and the No Build Alternative. The freeway alternatives have two northbound and two southbound lanes separated by an unpaved median. Traffic enters and exits the freeway at interchanges. Along some portions of the TSM alternative, traffic will only be allowed to enter and exit at specific intersections. For other portions of the TSM, traffic may enter using driveways and intersections just as on the existing highway through the city.

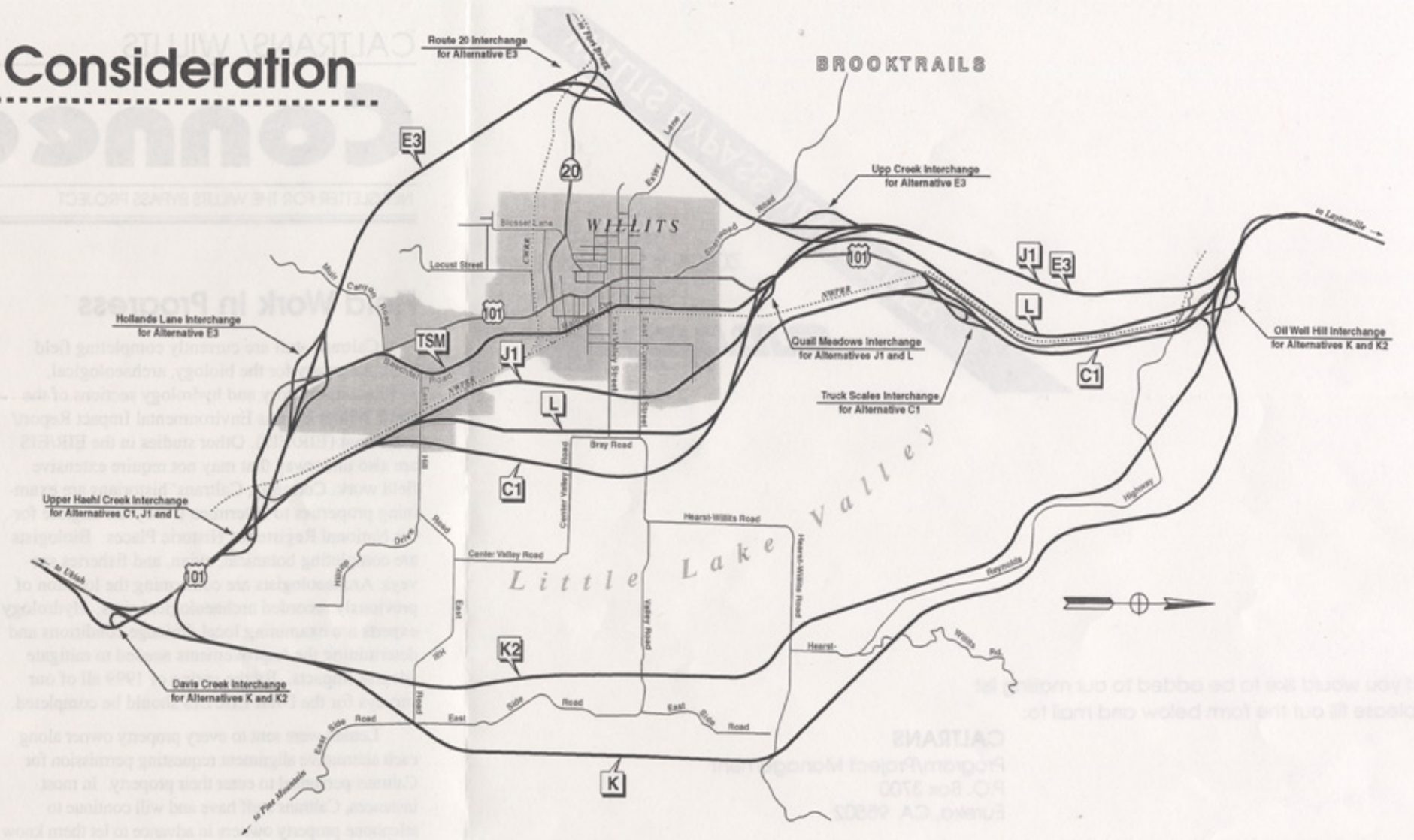
Two of the freeway alternatives (K and K2) bypass Willits to the east, while one freeway alternative (E3) bypasses the town to the west. The remaining three freeway alternatives (C1, J1, and L) skirt the east side of the city through the Little Lake Valley.

East Side Alternatives

The K and K2 alternatives have interchanges at their north and south ends where they connect to the existing highway. Traffic destined for Willits or Fort Bragg would exit Route 101 at one of the interchanges and head into town using the existing facilities, The K Alternative lies in the hills east of East Side Road and Reynolds Highway. The K2 Alternative runs along the east edge of the valley.

West Side Alternative

E3 Alternative traverses the hills west of the city. It has interchanges at its south end where it connects with existing Route 101, midway where it crosses Route 20, and toward the north in the Upp Creek area. Traffic heading to Willits has a choice of exits, while traffic heading to Fort Bragg would take the Route 20 exit, bypassing Willits.



Center Valley Alternatives

The C1, J1, and L Alternatives share a common interchange at the south where they connect to existing Route 101. Each has an interchange north of town. For the C1 alternative the interchange is near the existing truck scales. For J1 and L alternatives, the interchange is near Quail Meadows.

TSM Alternative

The Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative improves the existing highway from the end of the existing freeway to Baechtel Road by widening it to four through lanes plus a paved median. The paved median is used as a turning lane where needed and a buffer zone between opposing traffic elsewhere. The TSM improves Baechtel Road, Railroad Avenue, and Madden Lane, and connects these improved local roads with new streets. North of Commercial Street, the TSM cuts behind the high school and ties to existing Route 101 near Quail Meadows. This alternative will limit where traffic enters and exits the roadway. This will require some modifications to local streets. For example, Tuttle Lane, Pearl Street, and Mendocino Street would be connected together but would not connect to the TSM. (The TSM moves traffic best by connecting to only a few major streets.) There would be bridges at two railroad crossings of the Skunk Train tracks.

No Build Alternative

In all studies of this sort, Caltrans contrast the No Build Alternative against the other proposed alternatives. We need to be sure that the consequences of building something are not more serious than the results of doing nothing to address the problem. For the No Build Alternative, no construction to address the problems identified would take place, and the traffic would increase without any improvements.